

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for facilitating collaboration on a project using an
5 Application Service Provider, comprising the steps of:
 setting up projects containing data fields wherein each data field is
 assigned a unique identifier for recognizing data fields between databases that contain
 similar data but have different designations;
 publishing the data fields with their unique identifiers to a central
10 database;
 inviting collaborators to participate in projects, wherein collaborators
 can access the central database using the Internet to retrieve project data and
 associated unique identifiers if data fields in received information are unknown
 locally;
15 locally mapping retrieved or received data fields and associated unique
 identifiers;
 electronically exchanging information relating to projects between
 participants; and
 preserving individual ownership of project information.
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2. The method of claim 1, wherein the project is in the
construction industry.
3. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:
25 creating document histories by inserting new records into data fields
 within the document or message reflecting changes made to messages or documents
 as the message or documents are exchanged.
4. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:
30 generating reports on projects for a collaborator on an enterprise level
 or project specific level.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of setting up a project further comprises the steps of:

electronically transmitting project data fields to a database, wherein a
5 unique identifier is assigned to each data field;
returning the unique identifiers to a local computer;
locally mapping the unique identifiers;
choosing participants;
addressing invitations to collaborate;
10 electronically transmitting the invitations to collaborate to chosen
participants.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of electronically transmitting invitations further comprises the steps of:

15 converting the invitation into a transmittal format;
placing the invitation in an electronic envelope;
addressing the invitation;
creating a document history record; and
electronically sending the invitation.

20 7. The method of claim 6, wherein the transmittal format is XML.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of electronically exchanging information further comprises the steps of:

25 selecting a document to exchange;
determining whether all data fields in the document each have a unique
identifier, and if some data fields do not have unique identifiers, then electronically
transmitting those data fields to a central database, wherein unique identifiers are
assigned to the data fields; and
30 electronically transmitting the document.

9. The method of claim 6, wherein the step of electronically transmitting the document further comprises the steps of:

converting the document into a transmittal format;
placing the document in an electronic envelope;
addressing the document;
creating a document history record; and
electronically sending the document.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein the transmittal format is XML.

11. The method of claim 6, wherein the step of electronically exchanging information further comprises the steps of:

receiving a message;
placing the message in addressee's queue to be accepted;
determining whether to accept the message, and if the message is not accepted, then returning the message to sender, but if the message is accepted, then
determining whether all data fields of the message have unique identifiers locally, and if all data fields do not have local global unique identifiers, then mapping all data, but if all data fields do have local unique identifiers, then
marking data as read;
marking document as useable;
determining whether a return receipt was requested, and if a return receipt was requested, then notifying sender, but if a return receipt was not requested, then ending.

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but if the addressee does not have sufficient permissions for the
25 message then rejecting the message and notifying sender.

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- rejecting message;
- notifying sender of rejection; and
- removing local copy of message.

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and

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creating in a local computing area an electronic document having data fields containing information to be shared;

returning the unique identifiers to the local computing area wherein the unique identifiers are locally associated with their corresponding data fields;

inserting the routing information into the document;

receiving the document at a server;

15 responding to the document by sending a message having data fields
associated with unique identifiers stored in a central database accessible by
addressees.

17. A computer system for exchanging messages and documents in the construction industry, comprising:

a processing unit;

a memory storage device;

5 a display device coupled to the processing unit for displaying data;

a program module providing access to a distributed computer network, operable for

exchanging information contained in data fields wherein each data field is associated with a unique identifier;

10 routing information to addressees wherein the routing information associated with an addressee's unique identifier is retrieved from a central database; and

tracking modifications in exchanged messages by inserting new records into document tables.

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